

Health and Injury Risks EMOTIONAL STRESS	PHOENIX FIRE DEPARTMENT HEALTH & FITNESS M. P. 1-A02.06 01/2012-R Page 1 of 4
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INTRODUCTION

Stress is present in physical and psychological forces experienced every day. It is important to remember that certain amounts and types of stress are necessary for the growth and well being of an individual. However, when stress exceeds the capacity of the individual to effectively deal with it, stress can become detrimental. It has been estimated that approximately 40-80% of all physical injuries and illnesses have an underlying cause or relationship with stress.

FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

Stress, regardless of its origin, elicits certain responses in the individual. These responses are designed to prepare the individual to deal effectively with a stressful event. There are three stages of response collectively referred to as the "fight or flight syndrome."

First Stage

The first stage is the alarm reaction and involves the fight or flight response. The individual must make a crucial decision of whether to stay and resist ("fight" the stress) or to turn and take flight. Regardless of the decision made, the body's physical responses are identical. These changes include;

- Increased heart rate.
- Increased blood pressure.
- Increased blood flow too skeletal muscles.
- Increased blood sugar levels.
- Pupil dilation.
- Increased mentation.

Second Stage

This is most commonly referred to as the stage of resistance. It is that period of time when the body attempts to compensate for the stress being placed upon it. The length of time this stage can be sustained is limited. If the resistance to stress is not elevated, eventually the body will lose its ability to adapt to the stress.

Third Stage

The final stage is exhaustion, a natural part of the sequence of events that allows the individual a period to recover and prepare to meet the next stress. If the stress is still present, the body is now unable to protect itself and begins to suffer the ill effects of stress as seen in the breakdown of bodily systems (diseases) and eventually death.

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EMOTIONAL STRESS

Emotional stress is probably one of the most significant factors in contributing to the disease process. It has been hypothesized by Hans Selye, a Canadian Endocrinologist, that the same three stages of stress that were found beneficial in preparing and protecting the body from physical stress could be responsible for stress' role in the disease process. In the Fire Service emotional stress might be from the anticipation of the next call, or the helplessness felt in dealing with human suffering and death.

The apparent problem with emotional stress is a consequence of it not being a tangible force. In other words, when dealing with physical stress, there is a physical task associated with it, such as pulling a hose or fighting fire. There exists the opportunity to recognize the stress and then do something physical to effectively reduce the stress. However, this is often not the case with emotional stress.

It is difficult to recognize what events will cause emotional stress. Emotional stress is different for every individual because it is based on perception. Therefore, anything that is imagined as a threat to an individual's welfare becomes a stress. Secondly, because there is usually no direct physical outlet for emotional stress, there may be despair on how to cope with it.

It would seem that a logical solution would be to try to recognize what causes emotional stress on an individual basis. Unfortunately, this may be difficult to do, because the origin of the stress is not easily identified. It might be more appropriate to look at some of the subtle signs of emotional stress.

Signs & Symptoms

Emotional stress might surface as;

- increased irritability
- decreased sleep
- anxiety
- reduced productivity
- variety of abnormal behavioral patterns.

STRESS ASSESSMENT

There have been questionnaires developed which list many known emotional stresses an individual is likely to encounter. Each event is assigned a point value and the individual is asked to identify which they have been exposed. A composite score is then produced which will give an indication of the current stress level.

STRESS ASSESSMENT

Below are events that occur in the process of living. For each event experienced in the last twelve months enter the corresponding points in the adjacent blank. Total the points to get a composite score.

<u>LIFE EVENTS</u>	<u>POINTS</u>	
Death of spouse	100	_____
Divorce	73	_____
Marital separation	65	_____
Jail term	63	_____
Personal injury or illness	53	_____
Marriage	50	_____
Termination from work	47	_____
Marital reconciliation	45	_____
Retirement	45	_____
Change in family member's health	44	_____
Pregnancy (self or spouse)	40	_____
Sexual difficulties	39	_____
Addition to family	39	_____
Business readjustment	39	_____
Change in financial status	38	_____
Death of a close friend	37	_____
Increase of marital arguments	35	_____
Mortgage or loan over \$10,000	31	_____
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	_____
Change in work responsibilities	29	_____
Son or daughter leaving home	29	_____
Trouble with in-laws	29	_____
Outstanding personal achievement	28	_____
Spouse's beginning or stopping work	26	_____
Starting or finishing school	26	_____
Change in living condition	25	_____
Revision of personal habits	24	_____
Trouble with boss	23	_____
Change of work hours, conditions	20	_____
Change of residence	20	_____
Change in church activities	19	_____
Change in social activities	18	_____
Mortgage or loan under \$10,000	17	_____
Change in sleeping habits	15	_____
Change in family gatherings	15	_____
Change in eating habits	15	_____
Vacation	13	_____
Holiday season	12	_____
Minor violations of the law	11	_____
	SCORE	_____

A total score of;
 300 - Indicates high stress levels.
 150 to 300 - Indicates moderate stress levels.
 150 and below indicates low stress levels.

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PREVENTATIVE MEASURES

The Employee Assistance Program is a good place to start if you are already feeling the effects of stress.

1. Firestrong – www.firestrong.org 602-495-7551
 - a. Crisis Options:
 - i. Fire Crisis Support Line – 602-845-FIRE (3473)
 - b. CR Program – 602-370-5721
 - c. Counseling Options:
 - i. Member Assistance Program, Director Ron Tapscott 602-722-4087
 - d. Aetna – 1-888-238-6232 (Dial 1 Twice for Member Services & Outpatient Counseling Services) Password: 4PHXFIRE

A more pro-active approach is to become involved in a fitness program.